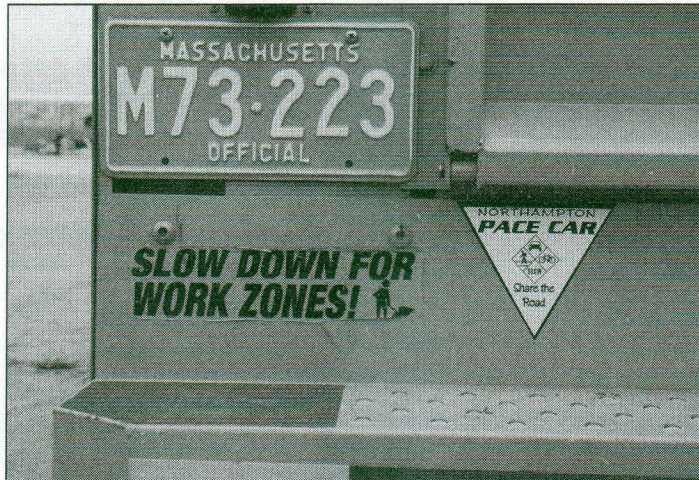


## City hopes to slow pace of traffic

Northampton this spring became the first Massachusetts community to introduce a traffic-calming approach that depends on residents and city employees to set examples as good drivers.

The initiative, which has been used in cities including Boise, Idaho, Greensboro, N.C., and Palo Alto, Calif., is known as the Pace Car program. Participants mount a yellow triangle on the backs of their vehicles. In Northampton, the triangles say "Northampton Pace Car" above icons representing other cars, pedestrians, and cyclists. Below the icon is the legend "Share the Road."

According to David Narkewicz, a city councillor who is also chair of Northampton's Transporta-



Public works vehicles in Northampton sport yellow triangles, signs of a program designed to discourage aggressive driving.

tion and Parking Commission, the number of vehicles in the city has increased by about 23 percent since 1990, even though there has been no significant change in population during that period. The increased traffic, Narkewicz says, has become a prominent concern for both city officials

and neighborhood groups.

By late June, not long after the program was launched, roughly 50 citizens had signed a "Pace Car Pledge," promising not just to drive carefully but to "walk, bike, bus or share a ride when possible to help reduce traffic."

More than 25 public works and other municipal vehicles also sport the Pace Car triangles.

"It's a good way for [city employees] to remember that they need to obey the rules of the road," says Mayor Mary Clare Higgins.

Higgins says she proposed the idea for the Pace Car in March after learning about it at a meeting of the U.S. Congress of Mayors. According to the Web site LessTraffic.com, cars with the Pace Car designation can serve as a "mobile speed bump. ... When enough people join, traffic is effectively calmed."

But for many communities, reaching a critical mass has proven difficult, according to the Web site. In Northampton, Narkewicz says, the city's neighborhood groups, eager for

means to discourage motorists from using their residential streets as shortcuts, could help spur wide adoption of the Pace Car triangles. While having a concentration of careful drivers in a neighborhood could serve to calm traffic in that particular area, the benefit, according to Narkewicz, could be citywide.

"That's the beauty of the Pace Car program," he says. "People taking a look at their own driving habits, and the impact that their driving has on other people's neighborhoods, and vice versa."

George Andrikidis, who retired as DPW director at the end of June, expressed some concern that by driving slowly, motorists sporting the yellow triangles might frustrate other drivers to the point of inducing road rage.

But LessTraffic.com suggests that, on the contrary, the Pace Car designation eliminates the potential for confusion: "Instead of the driver behind thinking they are stuck behind some 'idiot' who doesn't know how to drive, the Pace Car sticker lets them know that there is a purpose for why the car is being driven within the speed limit."

## Town Report Contest entries due in September

Entries are now being accepted for the MMA's Annual Town Report Contest for the year ending in 2005.

Each entry will be reviewed by two judges, chosen based on their expertise in the field and their ability to remain impartial.

First-, second-, and third-place winners will be selected in each of three categories based on population: less than 5,000; 5,000-12,499; and 12,500-plus.

Judging criteria include attractiveness of the report cover and layout; material arrangement; presentation of statistics and data; summary of the year's achievements; evidence of local planning for the future; and the report's practical utility.

Winners will be recognized and given a plaque during an awards ceremony at the MMA's 2007 Annual Meeting & Trade Show in January.

To enter, send two copies of your town report by Sept. 8 to: Town Report Contest, MMA, One Winthrop Square, Boston, MA 02110. (Two copies are required so that each judge may review the publication independently.)

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*This monthly column highlights some of the innovative approaches and strategies Massachusetts municipalities are using to deliver services and solve problems. If you know of a Mass Innovation that could be featured in this column, contact Mitch Evich at the MMA (phone: (800) 882-1498; fax: (617) 695-1314; e-mail: mevich@mma.org).*